

VZCZCXRO3595
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #0345/01 0571648
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 261648Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5373
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 0873
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0078
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1714
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0677
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000345

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
BAGHDAD FOR DMCCULLOUGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/26/2019

TAGS: [KISL](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: DELAY NAMING NEW SHEHU MAY SIGNAL TROUBLE
IN BORNO STATE

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: On February 21 the Shehu of Borno (a traditional ruler and religious figure who is ranked second after the Sultan of Sokoto among Northern Nigeria's royals), Alhaji Mustapha bin Umar Kyari Amin El-Kanemi, died of cancer at the age of 85. Traditionally a new Shehu is named within three days; however at this time, five days later, a new Shehu has not yet been announced. Local press speculates that the delay is due to pressure from highly placed individuals trying to influence the choice of the successor. The kingmakers (a group of select religious clerics and traditional office holders) nominated three members of the Borno royal family in ranked order from whom the state Governor is to make the final selection. The three candidates are a son and brother of the late Shehu, both of whom are considered widely popular, as well as Abba Kyari Shehu Garbai, who is reportedly Borno State Governor Modu Sheriff's favored contender. Garbai supported Sheriff during his 2003 gubernatorial campaign, and Sheriff recently made Garbai a district head - an appointment which was apparently intended to strengthen Garbai's candidacy (the fact of the Shehu's terminal illness was well known). If Governor Sheriff attempts to impose Garbai as the new Shehu, the Governor's unpopularity with the public could spark violence in yet another northern state. End Summary.

12. (U) On February 21 the Shehu of Borno, Alhaji Mustapha bin Umar Kyari Amin El-Kanemi, died of cancer at the age of 85. The Shehu, who was also Vice President on the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, had ruled as a traditional and spiritual leader since 1974. The funeral was attended by President Yar'Adua, Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Alhaji Yayle Ahmed, the Sultan of Sokoto Alhaji Saad Abubakar III, and the Emir of Kano Alhaji Ado Bayero. The Shehu was well known for his humility and support for ethno-religious tolerance.

Succession Issues

- - - - -
13. (U) Traditionally a new Shehu is named within three days of his death; however at this time, five days later, a new Shehu has not yet been announced. According to press reports, pressure from highly placed individuals trying to influence the choice of the successor are causing the delay.

'Leadership' newspaper reported on February 26 that Borno State Governor Modu Sheriff intends to announce the new Shehu after consultations with President Yar'Adua and the Sultan of Sokoto. It quoted a "palace source" as saying that a new Shehu will emerge before Friday prayers on February 27.

14. (U) It is customary for the kingmakers (a group of senior clerics and members of the traditional ruler's entourage) to nominate 2-3 individuals in ranked order from which the state Governor makes the final selection. According to Pol Specialist, there have been only a few rare occasions since colonial times when the governing authorities have not approved the kingmakers' first choice as successor for traditional leader positions.

15. (C) This time, the three contenders nominated for the new Shehu are: Baba Shehu Mustapha, District Head of Nganzai and the eldest son of the late Shehu; Abba Rufai Umar, of the Nigerian Ports Authority and the younger brother of the late Shehu; and Abba Kyari Shehu Garbai, District head of Magumeri and Permanent Secretary in the Ministry for Local Governments and Chieftaincy Affairs, and son of the 17th Shehu Umar ibn Garbai. Local press suggests that Garbai is Governor Sheriff's favored contender. Pol Specialist noted that when Sheriff campaigned for Governor in 2003, Garbai was the only member of the royal family who supported him. The Governor named Garbai the District head of Magumeri just two months ago. (Comment: In Borno, contenders to be Shehu, in addition to coming from the royal family, customarily have also served as district heads. End comment.) Many observers believe Sheriff made this appointment because he was aware the Shehu

ABUJA 00000345 002 OF 002

was in poor health, and wanted to strengthen Garbai's chance to succeed him. According to Pol Specialist's contacts, the late Shehu's son and brother are both widely respected, while Garbai is considered a stooge of the increasingly unpopular Governor Sheriff.

Comment

- - - -

16. (C) Mission contacts within the security services have warned that a move by Sheriff to impose Garbai as Shehu could spark violence in the area. President Yar'Adua, while he was Governor of Katsina State, scrupulously stayed out of a similar succession contest for Katsina Emir despite pressure from, inter alia, his wife Turai. We would be surprised if he is not urging a similar course on Sheriff. Given that something as innocuous as a dispute over parking ignited violence in Bauchi over the past weekend, and the significant death toll caused by violence in Jos in November 2008, Yar'Adua would be right to be concerned about what Governor Sheriff decides to do. End comment.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS